DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 269 876 EA 018 478

AUTHOR Curtis, Thomas E.
TITLE Current Status of Performing Arts Secondary Schools in the United States.
PUB DATE 20 Apr 86
NOTE 6p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (70th, San Francisco, CA, April 16-20, 1986).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Art; *Art Education; Curriculum Design; *Magnet Schools; *Nontraditional Education; Questionnaires; Secondary Education; Theater Arts; Urban Schools

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to examine policies and curriculum practices in performing arts secondary schools in the United States. Data were obtained from a survey (including questionnaires, opinionnaires, interviews, and observations) conducted among 55 schools (total number existent in 1980) and visits to 11 selected institutions in the southeastern and midwestern sections of the United States. Results include the following: (1) Most performing arts secondary schools are located in large urban areas because of social forces and the large numbers of potentially talented youngsters; (2) stated purposes for origination were development of magnet schools and need for specialized practical experience in arts; (3) curriculum included at least 10 hours of arts each week plus time equivalent to traditional secondary schools in traditional subjects and extracurricular activities; (4) evolution in 10 years has led to an increase both in quantity and quality of student bodies; (5) an increase in numbers of performing arts secondary schools from five in 1970 to 55 in 1980 to an estimated count of almost 100 in 1985 indicates a rapid growth of such schools, which presages a future impact upon the development of generic secondary schools. (Author/PGD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED269876

Current Status of Performing Arts Secondary Schools in the United States

Thomas E. Curtis
Associate Professor of Education
State University of New York at Albany

Paper Presentation, National Conference
American Educational Research Association
April 20, 1986

The purpose of this research was to examine policies and curriculum practices in performing arts secondary schools in the United States. Data obtained from questionnaires, opinionnaires, interviews and observations were collated as a result of a survey conducted among 55 schools (total number existent in 1980) and visits to 11 selected institutions in the southeastern and midwestern sections of the United States. Results include the following:

1. Most performing arts secondary schools are located in large urban areas due to social forces and the large numbers of potentially talented youngsters.

2. Stated purposes for origination were development of magnet schools and need for specialized practical experience in arts.

3. Curriculum included at least 10 hours of arts each week plus time equivalent to traditional secondary schools in traditional subjects and extra curricular activities.

4. Evolution in 10 years has led to an increase both in quantity and quality in student bodies.

5. An increase in numbers of performing arts secondary schools from five in 1970 to 55 in 1980 (with informal note of almost 100 in 1985) indicates a rapid growth of such schools which presages a future impact upon the development of generic secondary schools.

EA 018 478

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Thomas E. Curtis

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Current Status of Performing Arts Secondary Schools in the United States

Thomas E. Curtis
State University of New York at Albany

Paper Presentation, National Conference
American Educational Research Association
April 20, 1986

Objectives

The purpose of this research was to examine policies and curriculum practices in performing arts secondary schools in the United States, and the impact of their recent increase both in quantity and influence upon the American cultural scene. The specific objective of the research was to study, through a series of questionnaires, opinionnaires, structured interviews and observations, the phenomenon of the growth, current status and possible future of the performing arts secondary school movement in the United States.

Perspective

Research in this area is advisable due to curricular questions arising from the development of secondary schools, primarily in large cities, which have been organized to meet specific needs of talented youth who wish to specialize in the performing arts. Debate about such schools, "Magnet Schools" in many cases, has raised such perennial curriculum issues as: curriculum balance, scope, sequence and degree of student specialization, among others. Increasingly turbulent controversy has arisen as to where a seemingly diminished tax dollar should go. The "new basics" as exemplified by the report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education indicate a curricular direction seemingly tangential to that of performing arts. However, educational voices have been heard expressing the view that the primary purpose of education should be the enhancement of the individual quality of life. According to this model of thought other subsidiary objectives are valid to the extent that they are influential in the achievement of that primary purpose. If this premise is accepted and if the current increase of new performing arts secondary schools continues, then it becomes increasingly important to study this new organizational phenomenon.

Methods

In order to determine curricular implications of the growth in numbers and importance of performing arts secondary school programs in the United States the following methodology was employed.

1. A review of related literature was conducted emphasizing performing arts secondary schools and magnet schools.

2. A questionnaire and an opinionnaire were transmitted to administrators of 55 performing arts secondary schools in the United States (total number existent in 1980) during the Spring of 1984.

3. Responses to the questionnaires and opinionnaires which were returned by administrators from 32 schools were collated. Twelve other schools were not used in the study due to difficulty in making contact, or responses indicating that they were not performing arts secondary schools. (Thus, of the 55 schools approached, 12 were not appropriate for the study for various reasons. Thirty-two of the remaining 43 school administrators responded for a 75 per cent response rate.) Structured interviews and observations were conducted at 11 selected representative institutions throughout the southeastern and midwestern sections of the United States during the Autumn of 1984.

4. Data obtained from questionnaires, opinionnaires, interviews and observations were collated and research results were developed.

Results

Five general research questions served as the foci for the questionnaires, opinionnaires and structured interviews which occurred from April, 1984, to May, 1985. The research questions with general responses follow.

I. What societal forces were influential in the development of performing arts secondary schools?

Most performing arts secondary schools are the product of large urban areas, both because of the large numbers of potentially talented youngsters needed to insure a viable artistic setting, and also because of social forces more evident in the urban setting. For example, a substantial number of respondents reported that desegregation with an attendant emphasis upon magnet schools was a crucial factor in the inception of their performing arts secondary schools. In a lesser, but still noticeable number of cases, a community demand for alternative means of educating adolescents was reported to be critical in the inception of these schools.

II. What are the stated purposes for origination of performing arts secondary schools?

The stated purposes, as might be expected from the responses cited in the first question, were the development of magnet schools, the need for more specialized and professionally practical experiences in the arts, and the achievement of alternative educational procedures.

III. In what ways is the curriculum of performing arts secondary schools substantially different from that of traditional secondary schools?

The curriculum varied, in the most obvious manner, in that 10 hours or more per week were commonly given to the practice of performing arts. Interestingly enough, respondents reported time spent on "basic" high school courses were equivalent to the community standard. In addition, a majority reported a full slate of extra curricular activities, and almost all had counseling and other such support services.

IV. In what ways are the student body and faculty of performing arts secondary schools substantially different from those of traditional secondary schools?

Students, obviously, were selected on the basis of high abilities in one or more of the performing arts. In addition, in academic areas, based upon teacher observation, grades and standardized instruments, they ranked equivalent to or in many cases higher than their mates who remained in traditional settings. Most students, however, did plan to attend college rather than attempt a professional career after graduation from high school. Teachers were selected in most cases on the basis of professional experience. Many were not trained in teacher education, and some were not even licensed, having received special approval to teach based upon the unique nature of their school.

V. What evolution in organization, curriculum or stated purposes has occurred since the inception of performing arts secondary schools?

Most schools, at their inception, were relatively small and have expanded considerably in the decade or so of their existence. Due to the artistically professional nature of the staff, teacher turnover has been quite high. Almost all respondents noted an increasingly higher standard in the achievement of students both in performing arts and in general studies.

Some information tangential to the basic five questions did appear as a result of the correspondence and visits. Although not responding directly to those questions some data seemed of sufficient import to note.

1. Performing arts secondary schools are a new phenomenon (five schools founded before 1970 -- almost 100 before 1985).

2. Enrolment was relatively small when compared to most urban high schools (median = 550 pupils).

3. Majority of schools contained grades nine through twelve (75%).

4. Dance was most often mentioned as being given priority in these schools.

Respondents were asked to express concerns about the present or future of performing arts high schools. While these responses are tangential to the five areas noted above, they seemed important.

1. They expressed concern that increasing academic requirements, both in terms of extra courses and greater time commitment to each might create vital inroads into the time available for students to give to the performing arts.

2. A major question was whether seventh and eighth grade students should be in a performing arts setting, or the more traditional middle school setting.

3. Funding has been, and will continue to be, a problem because of more expensive equipment and buildings, and more individualized teaching techniques.

4. Recruitment techniques, in terms of philosophy, and specifics of audition are of great concern to performing arts educators. At what age should students be auditioned, what criteria should be utilized, what standards maintained?

Educational Importance

Three major points of significance, among others, come immediately to mind. They are, in ascending order of generality:

1. The Magnet Schools movement was a major factor in the development of performing arts secondary schools. A desire among both pupils and their parents to have an opportunity to perform in a more artistic milieu fitted admirably to the needs of school districts to desegregate in some meaningful way. Implications for special schools for arts, sciences and other areas of specialization abound.

2. A growth in numbers of performing arts secondary schools in the next decade seems inevitable (from a few in 1970 to almost 100 in 1985). A knowledge of details concerning inception, problems, strengths, philosophies and other such considerations should make the development of new performing arts secondary schools more effective as well as less difficult.

3. A study of curriculum foundations, models, and programs as they relate to performing arts secondary schools should permit an insight into means by which innovative programs in general come to fruition in the modern American culture.